



Questions and Answers

EPA's Back to School Webinar: Managing Asthma in Schools

Answers provided by:

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Q: There is no cure for asthma but it can be controlled. Is it possible for adult staff members to acquire asthma from exposures at work?

Yes, we had two staff members who developed adult onset asthma during the time that they worked at the school. We also had reports of various respiratory illnesses and allergy symptoms in certain areas of the building. It can be difficult to prove these symptoms developed from the school environment, but when there are multiple complaints it is important to investigate further what might be present in the school environment.

Q: For nurses who do not work in schools, but work with children with asthma as case managers, how do we determine whether our school district has an in-school asthma program?

I would recommend contacting the school district health services department and/or the school nurse of the school to find out if there is an in-school asthma program.

Q: What is your policy for teachers and animals? Do you allow pets in the classroom?

No, we do not allow warm-blooded animals as classroom pets. Pet dander and odor may cause indoor air quality problems and be asthma triggers for students and staff. It's very difficult to remove pet dander and odor from the classroom once it is present. Pet dander may take six months to be completely removed from a room and all warm-blooded animals can be a trigger.

Fish are an alternate pet for the classroom, as long as the tank is kept clean.

Q: Do you allow fabric couches and/or chairs in your elementary school classrooms?

These are discouraged but they are present in some school settings.

Q: What is the state prevalence of asthma in youth in Iowa?

Between nine and 10 percent of Iowa children (62,000 to 67,000 of all 0 to 17 year olds) have ever had lifetime asthma, and seven percent of Iowa children (45,000 to 50,000) have diagnosed current asthma (Source: Asthma in Iowa: Child Asthma Surveillance Report: BRFSS, YRBS, ICFHHS, IYTS, NSCH, NHIS: 2001-2006).

Previous Data: In Iowa, about seven percent of the population (150,000 adults and 40,000 to 50,000 children) has asthma. Within the state, 50 to 60 deaths, about 12,000 inpatient hospitalizations, 40,000 to 50,000 emergency department visits, and 35,000 to 45,000 unscheduled office visits are due to asthma each year. The direct medical and indirect economic cost associated with asthma in Iowa each year is estimated at \$150,000,000. (Source: Asthma in Iowa: Surveillance Report, 1995 -2000)

According to the 2009 Iowa Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey, an annual telephone survey of Iowans to help monitor the prevalence of health conditions and behaviors, 10.3 percent of adult Iowans reported they had ever been told that they had asthma by a doctor. This percentage increased by 1.8 percent since 2000 (8.5%).